

National Animal Identification System

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The National Animal Identification System (NAIS) is a national program intended to identify animals and track them as they come into contact with, or commingle with, animals other than herdmates from their premises of origin.

The system is being developed for all species that would benefit from rapid tracebacks in the event of a disease concern. Currently, working groups comprised of industry and government representatives are developing plans for cattle, swine, sheep, goats, horses, poultry, bison, deer, elk, llamas, and alpacas.

Already, many of these species can be identified through some sort of identification system, but these systems are not consistent across the country. Tracing an animal's movements can therefore be a time-consuming endeavor during a disease investigation, especially if the animal has moved across State lines.

In April 2004, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced the framework for implementing the NAIS—an animal identification and tracking system that will be used in all States and that will operate under national standards. When fully operational, the system will be capable of tracing a sick animal or group of animals back to the herd or premises that is the most likely source of infection. It will also be able to trace potentially exposed animals that were moved out from that herd or premises. The sooner animal health officials can identify infected and exposed animals and premises, the sooner they can contain the disease and stop its spread.

The NAIS will enhance U.S. efforts to respond to intentionally or unintentionally introduced outbreaks of animal diseases more quickly and effectively. USDA's long-term goal is to establish a system that can identify all premises and animals that have had direct contact with a foreign animal disease or a domestic disease of concern within 48 hours of discovery.

The first step in implementing the NAIS is identifying and registering premises that house animals. Such premises include locations where livestock and poultry are managed, marketed, or exhibited. Knowing where animals are located is the key to efficient, accurate, and cost-effective epidemiologic investigations and disease-control efforts.

USDA anticipates that all States will have the capability to register premises according to the national standards by 2005. Officials with USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) are currently training State officials on how to use a standardized premises registration system. USDA is also evaluating alternative registration systems that States or others have developed and want to use, to ensure that those systems meet the national standards. In addition, USDA is working with States and industry to educate the public about the NAIS.

As premises are registered, another component of the NAIS—animal identification—will be integrated into the system. Unique Animal Identification Numbers (AINs) will be issued to individually identified premises. In the case of animals that move in groups through

the production chain—such as swine and poultry—the group will be identified through a Group/Lot Identification Number.

USDA is developing the standards for collecting and reporting information, but industry will determine which type of identification method works best for each species. These methods could include radio frequency identification tags, retinal scans, DNA, or others. As long as the necessary data are sent to USDA's information repositories in a standardized form, it will be accepted.

USDA will build upon existing identification systems and allow for a transition period from systems currently defined in the Code of Federal Regulations before requiring AINs or Group/Lot IDs. Working with States and industry, USDA will also evaluate various animal identification technologies to determine how the collection of animal movement records can best be automated. And we will encourage as much participation as possible.

As premises are registered and animals or groups of animals are identified based on the standard protocols, USDA will begin collecting information about animal movements from one premises to another. With an efficient, effective animal tracking system in place, USDA will be able to perform rapid tracebacks in case of an animal disease outbreak. As envisioned, only Federal, State, and Tribal animal-health authorities would have direct access to the national premises and animal identification information repositories. They need this information to accomplish their job of safeguarding animal health.

USDA is investigating various options to protect the confidentiality of the information. It is important to note that the national repositories will include information only for animal and disease tracking purposes. Proprietary production data will remain in private databases.

If USDA decides to make all or parts of the NAIS mandatory, APHIS will follow the normal rulemaking process. The public will have the opportunity to comment upon any proposed regulations.

Additional Information

Learn more about the NAIS at <<http://www.usda.gov/nais>>.

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